EXCISE

B-6

(3)

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR — REVIEWED BY H Heitkuen — DATE 4/29/96
RDS ☐ or XQS ☐ — TS AUTH — DATE — REASON (S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS — RELEASABLE ☐ — CLASSIFIED ☐ — DENIED ☐ — in part B-6
DECLASSIFIED ☐ — RELEASABLE ☐ — PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

AIR POUCH
PRIORITY

CONFIDENTIAL
(Security Classification)

DO NOT TYPE IN THIS SPACE
760.00/5-856

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM: AMEMBASSY, TEL AVIV

700
DESP. NO.

TO: DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

May 8, 1956
DATE

N.A.R-7/16/56 EUR:EE:JKaufmuk 5/16/56

SUBJECT: PERIPHERAL: Information Obtained From [redacted] Recent Arrival From Latvia.

B-6

DEPT. [illegible]

INFO OTHER [illegible]

This Document Must Be Returned to RM/R Central Files

760.00/5-856

The information set forth in the present despatch has been obtained from [redacted] who arrived in Israel from Riga, Latvia in March of this year. [redacted] was born in Western Germany but settled in Riga during her youth. There she married an Aryan who later decided to immigrate to Germany. [redacted] refused to accompany him in view of the anti-Jewish measures being carried out there, they were divorced and she was still in Riga when the Soviets entered. At the outbreak of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany, [redacted] fled to the Soviet Union and after eventually reaching Stalinobad was arrested and imprisoned on the charge of trying to escape from the Soviet Union. She spent five years in a camp near Novosibirsk and then, accused of making anti-Soviet statements, was again sentenced, this time before a military court to eight years hard labor. This period she spent in various work camps in Siberia and after completing her sentence was released in 1953 and allowed to return to Latvia. She was forbidden, however, to settle again in Riga but instead was forced to go to [redacted] a small town near the Lithuanian border. There she remained until mid-1955 when she moved to Riga where she stayed, albeit illegally, until her departure from the Soviet Union in March of this year.

[redacted] has two sisters in the United States with whom she was able to reestablish contact [redacted] She has applied for an immigration visa to the United States and hopes to be able to join her sisters there in the near future.

The informant was extremely cooperative in talking with an Embassy representative. She is obviously an intelligent woman and seems to have taken considerable interest in the life going on about her in Latvia. For the two years prior to her move to Riga she worked as a maid in the home of a dentist [redacted] After going to Riga she lived on the proceeds of packages from her sisters in the United States. She was therefore not in a position to know information concerning industrial developments nor did she have connections within party or governmental circles. She was able, however, to give a vivid picture of life for the ordinary person in the area.

JSSutterlin:mlf
REPORTER

CONFIDENTIAL

ACTION COPY — DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The action office must return this permanent record copy to DC/R files with an endorsement of action taken.

at the present time, and it is believed that some of the details which she furnished may prove of interest. From her account she has suffered greatly at the hands of the Communists, and it should be kept in mind that this may have resulted in a certain lack of objectivity in reporting on conditions in her former home.

1. The Present Population of Latvia.

According to the informant, Latvia is now populated predominantly by newcomers from the Soviet Union. Most of the Latvians who were deported in 1941 when the Soviets incorporated the area continue to reside in the Krasnoyarska Krai area. Another large group of Latvians is settled in the Tomsk-Omsk region of the Soviet Union. Not many of these Latvians have returned to their former homes in post-war days, although a few of the former leaders have come back. The informant mentioned specifically that the former Foreign Minister MUNTAS and the former Minister of War BALORDIS have both recently returned and are now receiving pensions from the Soviet Government. The entire pre-war Jewish population has disappeared and its place has been taken by Jews who have come to the area from the Soviet Union proper.

The Latvian language is seldom heard in the area at the present time except for the benefit of foreign visitors. The informant said that not long before her departure she attended a special performance of the ballet in Riga given for a visiting Austrian delegation. Before this performance a speech was given in Latvian which was the first time this had occurred as far as she was aware in many years. There remain, however, some remnants of the old Latvian population, particularly among the peasants, and these all remember with longing the days of Latvian independence. [redacted] not only they but the new Soviet residents as well would welcome the reestablishment of the Latvian Republic, but she had heard since her return to the area in 1953 of no organized resistance to the Soviet regime. Any type of opposition is simply suicide, she said. While theft is rife, she had not heard of any instances where the robbery was allegedly performed by Latvian nationalists.

The informant knew of no instance of emigres returning to Latvia from abroad in the past two years. She was acquainted with one family which had returned from France in 1947 only to have the father arrested eight months after his return. On the other hand, she said, the desire for emigration from the Latvian area is tremendous and many people have applied to come to Israel. As far as she was aware, this is the only country for which persons are being allowed to leave Latvia, though she had heard vaguely of one elderly lady who had been given permission to travel to Africa.

2. Conditions in the Area.

[redacted] there has since Stalin's death been a small but gradual increase in the standard of living in Riga but not in the surrounding provincial towns. [redacted] she stated, supplies are as scarce as ever, and it is still necessary to stand in line to obtain such necessities as bread, sugar, and meat. Salaries have not increased and for the most part people do not earn enough to cover even the bare essentials. As a result, theft and manipulation have become an essential part of life. With money it is possible to obtain everything and without standing in line. It is this problem of obtaining the money which dominates life for present-day Latvians. B-6

The informant gave numerous examples of the type of manipulation which goes on which while already familiar from other areas are recorded here as evidence of their prevalence in Latvia. Sales clerks in stores channel goods to friends and acquaintances who are willing to pay extra fees for this service. Dentists and doctors indulge in private practice although this is strictly forbidden. Public officials take bribes for all sorts of services, including the procurement of apartments. One of the most novel examples cited by the informant is the practice of selling winning lottery tickets for double their worth. There is a great demand for such tickets, she explained, since they serve as a justification for the expenditure of money for such luxury items as automobiles. Many people have the funds to buy such items but would have difficulty explaining where they obtained the money if questioned by government authorities. For this reason they are willing to pay lottery winners double their winnings merely for the excuse offered by such a ticket. B-6 [redacted] thought, in fact, that it is rather rare in the area for the persons who win the lottery to collect their winnings.

Life, she emphasized time and time again, has become a matter of manipulation not only in Latvia but throughout the whole Soviet Union. In order to obtain her passport for leaving the Soviet Union, she had to have a notarized copy of her birth certificate. She was able to obtain a birth certificate from West Germany but it was not correctly stamped and she therefore could not get a notary to notarize it for use in the Soviet Union. She had only to place 300 rubles in the envelope with the birth certificate when presenting it to the senior notary in Riga, however, in order to get the job done.

Likewise, the questionnaires which one must fill out in applying for an exit visa from the Soviet Union are so complicated and lengthy that the advice of a lawyer is required. It is not possible to take the questionnaire from the government office, and [redacted] had to persuade an attorney to go with her to the office in assisting her. Most attorneys were afraid to take such a job which entailed assisting a person to leave the Soviet Union, and B-6

she eventually was required to give a 500 ruble tip to a retired lawyer to go to the office with her. Since then, she said, the demand for exit permits has become so great and the number of mistakes made by applicants so numerous that the government has been forced to make available to applicants a legal adviser. Theoretically, there is no fee for his services but she said it is accepted practice that all applicants give to him 300 rubles. This, she said, was at least 200 rubles cheaper than she had had to pay, and she therefore considered the later applicants lucky.

Even in leaving the Soviet Union, she found it necessary to give a large bribe in order to get a train ticket to Budapest from Moscow, but with money almost anything is possible in the Soviet Union, she emphasized. Questioned whether this included the purchase of exit permits, she replied in the negative. This, she said, is one thing which, as far as she knew, could not be bought.

The complications which arise from manipulation and speculation are enormous, she said. As an example, the dentist for whom she worked made a practice of receiving patients privately. One such patient was dissatisfied with the treatment he had received and threatened to expose the dentist unless blackmail was paid. The dentist knew that this would be the beginning of the end and therefore chose instead to pay 1,000 rubles to the local procurator for "protection". This man called the patient in and told him that there would be no future in trying to make trouble for the dentist. The patient was particularly stubborn, however, and instead of accepting this went to the local paper and revealed not only that he had received private treatment from the dentist but alleged that the procurator had been bribed to keep him quiet. The matter eventually reached Riga and a doctor's commission was sent [redacted] B-6 to investigate the matter. The commission, after being served a sumptuous meal by the dentist, took a lenient view, however, since all of its members were well aware that most doctors and dentists are forced to practice privately in order to earn sufficient income.

In spite of the difficulties caused by the low salaries, they have not been increased since Stalin's death. Actually, incomes have been reduced, if anything, according to the informant. For one thing, the salaries paid to army officers were greatly decreased in the period just prior to the informant's departure. Since these officers had been among the highest paid group in the area, the reduction in their salaries was immediately felt by all of the retail sales outlets and particularly by those people indulging in private trade, such as tailors and shoemakers. A new tax was also introduced in recent months on pensions paid to invalids and elderly persons, thus making even more inadequate their already low income. Another measure which decreased actual income was the introduction of charges for hospital treatment. Even attendance at universities required a considerable outlay by the parents of the students [redacted]

B-6

[redacted] One family that she knew of had a son attending an engineering school in Moscow. For the first two years there he had not been able to obtain a room in a student home, and he had therefore been forced to pay 200 rubles a month for lodging. This money his family had had to find or he could not have stayed at the university.

Politically there was for a time a marked relaxation in the area although controls continued and no one felt free to speak openly against the government. As an illustration of the changed atmosphere, [redacted] following her return to Latvia she had great difficulty in registering with local [redacted] authorities since the responsible Communist functionary, seeing that she had been imprisoned on political grounds, made all sorts of difficulties for her. She finally was permitted to register only after she had gone to the local Party Secretary himself and threatened to write to Voroshilov if her registration were not accepted. Even after this, however, she found that a local Party representative had gone to her place of employment and to her landlady and stated that she was politically suspect. On hearing this she went directly to the man and spoke to him in the sharpest terms about persecuting her and demanded that henceforth she be left in peace. She said that such a course of action in Stalin's time would have been unthinkable but that in the period after his death it was not only allowed but produced good results. Arrests continue to take place but more on grounds of theft and dishonesty than for political reasons. During the period of the 20th Party Congress, however, she had noted a tightening of discipline, she said, and there were indications in Riga where she was then resident that stricter control was being reintroduced. She was, during this period, living illegally in Riga and had bribed a landlord to rent her a room. At this time he came to her and warned her that under no circumstances should she advertise her presence there since the authorities were again demanding him to keep strict account of all of his tenants. She noted during the Congress the reappearance of posters cautioning Soviet citizens to be careful with whom they spoke, and she said that in the Riga area at least there was an increase in the amount of anti-American propaganda being disseminated.

B-4

3. Reaction to the 20th Party Conference.

[redacted] the attitude taken at the 20th Party Conference towards Stalin had aroused a marked reaction in Riga. She did not seem while there to have heard specific reports on Khrushchev's by now famous secret speech concerning Stalin, but at the same time she seemed to be under the impression that Stalin had been termed a murderer publicly at the conference, thus indicating that the word was spread in some fashion. She thought that the reaction among the young people who had been raised under the Stalin cult was undoubtedly severe since it destroyed with one stroke the very basis of most of their training.

B-4

The people, she was certain, were not willing to disassociate the present leaders of the Soviet Union from the deeds which Stalin had committed while they were his close associates. Khrushchev and Bulganin have achieved no popularity in the area, she said, but on the contrary are looked upon by many as somewhat comical figures. While no one dares joke openly, she said, she knew from her close acquaintances that the population had gotten considerable amusement from the pictures which were so widely circulated of Khrushchev's and Bulganin's trip to India during which they donned a number of exotic costumes. One joke being told in the area in great secrecy concerning this trip is that a contest has been opened by the government for the best joke concerning the famed trip to India--first prize being 25 years imprisonment.

She cautioned that it is, of course, difficult to judge what the general reactions in Latvia are at the present time since no one dares speak his mind openly. She thought, though, that even the promises made at the Congress concerning higher salaries and lower working hours had been received with much reservation. One close friend of hers had said that "they", (i.e., the regime) would do better to pay a living wage and worry less about reducing the work day in the nebulous future.

4. Radio Reception.

In Riga reception of radio programs from the West is extremely difficult due to jamming, and the informant during her stay there did not hear any Western programs. Particularly the intellectual element of the population there suffers considerable frustration from its isolation from the Western world, she said. In [redacted] reception of foreign programs was better and there it was possible in the evening hours to hear broadcasts from BBC and from Europe fairly clearly. The informant did not herself have a radio at that time and therefore could not give many details on the subject, but she did have a friend in whose house she had heard the German-language programs from BBC clearly. B-6

5. Continued Existence of Large Number of Political Prisoners in the Soviet Union.

[redacted] after returning to Latvia she had continued to correspond with many acquaintances whom she had met while in Siberian camps. Most of these had been imprisoned on political grounds and were continuing to serve their sentences. Among her many acquaintances in Siberia, she said, none who had been accused of political crimes had been amnestied. She herself, she said, had served her full sentence. She was asked specifically whether following the amnesty late last year granted to persons accused of collaborating with the Germans she had noted the return of any such persons to the Latvian area. She said that she knew of no single instance where a person had returned under the provisions of this amnesty. B-6

6. Correspondence.

[redacted] there has been since Stalin's death a notable increase in the number of persons corresponding with relatives abroad, but there are many, she cautioned, who still consider it wiser not to show any foreign contacts. She said that she brought greetings from many such people to relatives in Israel. Three things prevent them from writing, she said. First, many in filling out questionnaires in the past stated that they had no relatives abroad. If they now commence correspondence, this will clearly show that they have lied. Secondly, persons in responsible positions fear that they may compromise their present status by writing to relatives and friends in the West. Thirdly, there is a general feeling that while it may be all right to correspond today, this correspondence may in a year or two be sufficient to bring all sorts of difficulties. This lack of security continues to pervade the atmosphere in the area, and people think not only of the present but of the future before they take such actions. In spite of all of these considerations, however, there has been a marked increase in the amount of correspondence going on, [redacted]

B-6

7. Salary Levels in the Area.

The present source said that the average salary [redacted] at the present time is 500 rubles monthly gross. On this the monthly tax deductions amount to about 120 rubles, leaving a net of 380 rubles. For a family of three each one of whom is entitled to nine square meters of dwelling space, the monthly rent comes to only 30 rubles, but the remaining 350 rubles is actually insufficient to purchase the basic food items required for the family even at the official price, and in a provincial town [redacted] the supplies on hand in the state stores are so irregular that they cannot be depended upon.

B-6

The legal net income of the dentist for whom the informant worked was only 320 rubles a month. A dental technician was paid a gross monthly salary of 400 rubles out of which he received a net of approximately 300. Educated persons who are forced to live on such salaries feel great bitterness toward the favored elements such as professors and high-ranking bureaucrats who often received a salary 10 or even 20 times greater. [redacted] there is a tendency for the new aristocracy to perpetuate itself. As evidence of this she cited the case of a high-ranking bureaucrat in Riga with whom she was acquainted. He had a son at a university studying to be an engineer, and when asked whether the son would be sent to the provinces after receiving his degree replied quite frankly that he was in a position to see to it that this did not occur. Proteksia is so important that it is now referred to

B-6

CONFIDENTIAL
(Classification)

in Russian slang by the word for the first symbol in the Russian lexicon, she said.

FOR THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I.

James S. Sutterlin

James S. Sutterlin
Second Secretary of Embassy

cc: Moscow

CONFIDENTIAL